SVETLANA

77 Madison Street
New York NY 10002

Monster

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Curated by Liam Considine

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Gallery Hours:
Thursday - Sunday, 12-6pm

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"Monster. From the classical Latin mōnstrum: portent, prodigy, monstrous creature, wicked person, monstrous act, atrocity; the base of monēre, to warn." -Oxford English Dictionary

Since ancient times monsters have policed the naturalized borderlands of the human. The minotaur menaces Greek myth as a sacrifice-demanding agent of unreason; the leviathan of the Hebrew Bible brokers chaos as the primeval enemy of God; the Beast of the Book of Revelation swallows sinners into the gaping mouth of Hell; medieval monsters augur both divine wrath and mercy, presenting a last chance to reform before catastrophe.

Modern monsters, by contrast, are man-made, and portend man-made disasters. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus (1818) bespeaks the violence of enclosures, mechanized production, and the plunder of bodies by industrialists and "resurrectionists" that looted the remains of criminals and the poor. Luddite rebellions and body panics were the result–metal coffins designed to thwart body snatchers first appeared the same year as Shelley's book.

We are in a new era of monsters now, which are fed back to us as kitsch ciphers for the outcast, the revolutionary, and the impossible. In Monster (2003) a sex worker goes on a killing spree against her Johns; in Stranger Things (2016-) the Soviets open a portal to "the Upside Down" dimension releasing the Mind Flayer onto a suburban shopping mall; Monster Energy Drink, urging us to "unleash the beast," is marketed to "athletes, musicians, anarchists, co-ed's, metal heads and hipsters" – anyone but the workers who actually drink it to finish a job or get through a shift.

As warnings, monsters have always been Janus-faced: by portending disaster, they point beyond naturalized regimes. The prodigious works in this exhibition correspondingly point beyond kitsch, beyond disaster, beyond a future that seems at once impossible and inevitable.